

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 830

CG 023 136

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TITLE The Scope of Practice of the Secondary School Counselor. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CG-90-8
PUB DATE 31 Jan 91
CONTRACT RI88062011
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Consultation Programs; *Counselor Role; Counselor Teacher Cooperation; Curriculum Design; *Developmental Programs; Group Counseling; Guidance Programs; Models; *Professional Recognition; *Program Design; Program Development; Program Evaluation; *School Counseling; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS *Comprehensive Guidance Program Model (Gysbers); Empowerment; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the scope of practice of the secondary school counselor in today's school, citing Norman Gysbers' Comprehensive Guidance Program Model as an approach to developmental counseling which empowers counselors to define their own scope of practice, and thereby effectively address the needs of their students. (TE)

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DIGEST

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January 31, 1991

The Scope of Practice of the Secondary School Counselor

Susan Jones Sears and Doris Rhea Coy

Introduction

Statistics from the 1988 Census data (U.S. Government, 1988) demonstrate how difficult it is to be a "kid" in America today. In just one day, an average of:

- 2,795 teenagers become pregnant
- 1,106 of those teens later have abortions
- 372 miscarry
- 1,027 babies are born drug- or alcohol-exposed in utero
- 211 children are arrested for drug abuse
- 437 are arrested for drinking and drunken driving
- 10 die from gunshot wounds
- 30 are wounded by gunfire
- 1,512 teens drop out of school
- 1,849 are abused or neglected
- 6 commit suicide
- 3,288 run away from home.

Obviously, more and more children and youth are coming to school with serious personal problems. In schools, the individuals trained to help students deal with their personal problems are school counselors. The role or scope of practice of the secondary school counselor in today's school is the focus of this digest.

Role of the Secondary School Counselor

Several influences have impacted what has been referred to as "the role" of secondary school counselors. Among the influences are state certification standards; counselor education training programs; the nature of school systems; professional organizations; principals and other administrators' beliefs about counselors; and the counselors themselves. Principals have had a major influence on counselors' roles. In many situations, principals have dictated "the role" by assigning the counselor "duties"—often administrative or quasi-administrative duties (e.g., counting credits, keeping track of attendance, discipline) that have little to do with the actual role of school counselors or the needs of students. School counselors appear to be reluctant or unable to convince principals that they should perform the duties for which they have been trained. This must change if school counselors are to have any influence in the restructured schools of the future.

In this complex and troubled society, school counselors are being asked to assume a greater role in the lives of their students and the students' families. The challenges facing counselors and demands on their time will continue to grow during the next decade. School counselors must choose carefully where they spend their time and energy. But, given the challenges faced by today's students, school counselors must focus on students' personal/social, educational, and career needs. In order to do so, counselors need to move from a services-oriented approach (orientation, information, assessment, counseling, placement, and follow-up) to a school counseling program approach. They must be clear about their "scope of

practice"—the responsibilities for which they are trained—and not allow themselves to become assistant principals, attendance officers, substitute teachers, and clerks.

A Program Approach to School Counseling

School counselors can exert more control over their scope of practice if they commit themselves to designing and implementing developmental school counseling programs (Gysbers, 1990). While crisis and remedial counseling will always be a part of the school counselor's responsibilities, counselors must provide assistance to as many students as possible. Emphasizing developmental counseling programs permits counselors to be seen as contributing to the growth of all students and not just working with those "in trouble." Developmental counseling programs focus on meeting students' needs and lead to activities and structured group experiences for all students (Gysbers, 1990). They are proactive rather than reactive and when counselors are busy implementing their program, they are unavailable for unrelated administrative and clerical duties (Gysbers, 1990).

Developmental Counseling Programs include both "content" and "process" components. The content component of the program speaks to:

1. The rationale for the program (why the school and children need a counseling program);
2. The personal-social, educational, and career development skills or competencies needed by children and youth; and
3. The management plan or blueprint intended to guide counselors' management of the counseling program.

The process component includes:

1. The activities counselors will use to help students achieve the designated skills or competencies;
2. The counseling strategies they intend to employ, e.g., individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance, and/or consultation; and
3. Methods to be used to evaluate their program and improve their effectiveness with students, staff, and parents (Sears, 1990).

The Scope of Practice of the School Counselor in Developmental Counseling Programs

In a comprehensive developmental school counseling program, the counselor has the following scope of practice (the responsibilities for which a school counselor is trained and qualified):

Design. Counselors design the content of the program. Gysbers, (1990) refers to this content as a "guidance curriculum." The content of the program is designed to help students gain skills or competencies in personal-social, educational, and career domains.

Following is a list of skills/competencies that one might expect to see in the content of a developmental counseling program.

1. **Personal-Social Skills.** Students will: (a) gain self-awareness and improve self-esteem; (b) make healthy choices and effective decisions; (c) assume responsibility for their own behavior; (d) respect individual differences and cooperate; and (e) learn to resolve conflicts.
2. **Educational Skills.** Students will: (a) acquire study and test-taking skills; (b) seek and use educational information; (c) set educational goals; and (d) make appropriate educational choices.
3. **Career Development Skills.** Students will: (a) analyze interests, aptitudes, and skills; (b) recognize effects of career stereotyping; (c) form a career identity; and (d) plan for their future careers (Sears, 1990).

Delivery. Counselors must be involved in the delivery of this developmental program content or curriculum that they have developed. They must allocate significant amounts of time to facilitate or team teach developmental learning activities in the classrooms. Also, they will need to set up inservices for teachers to enable them to assist in the facilitation of the activities. Counselors need to deliver their program content in small and large group sessions. Large group sessions may be appropriate for the information about and discussion of post-secondary or vocational education options and financial aid. Small groups may be more appropriate for interests or aptitude test interpretations.

Counsel. Counselors must counsel students both individually and in small groups. Counselors must not forget their unique counseling skills. While schools are not appropriate sites for "caseloads of clients," counselors must always allot time for counseling students with personal-social problems, both individually and in small groups. In order to be as effective as possible in a limited number of sessions, counselors should utilize newer theoretical approaches such as brief therapy.

Consult. Counselors must consult with parents, teachers, other educators, and various community agencies to help students deal with more serious personal and educational problems, both individually and in small groups. In order to be as effective as possible, in a limited number of sessions, counselors should utilize newer theoretical approaches such as brief therapy.

Coordinate. Counselors must coordinate or collaborate with others who may be offering mental health-oriented programs, e.g., substance abuse. Counselors report that more and more community-based programs are operating in the schools. The school counselors should either coordinate the efforts of these programs or collaborate in their delivery.

Testing programs are often coordinated by school counselors. In these days of accountability, counselors must be careful not to permit this responsibility to consume too much of their time. While counselors should understand thoroughly all relevant interest, aptitude, and achievement tests and should be able to offer inservices to teachers on their interpretation and use, they should not be spending their time in direct administration of tests.

Manage. Counselors must manage the school counseling program. Directors of guidance are a dying breed. Many counselors find themselves supervised by individuals who have more responsibilities than they can handle. Counselors must take charge of their own programs and encourage interaction and regular meetings of

the counselors in their district in order to assure program progress.

Managing a school counseling program includes developing an active staff/community public relations program. Counselors should orient staff and community to the counseling program through newsletters, local media, and school and community presentations.

Managing also involves pulling together advisory committees of parents and community members to gather input related to student needs. The management function is critical to the success of a school counseling program.

Evaluate. Counselors need to evaluate their efforts with students, staff, and community. Counselors can gather evaluation data from several sources. One source of information is "general evaluation" data which includes number of students seen in individual or crisis counseling, number of small group counseling sessions, number of large group information sessions, number of conferences with parents, and number of phone calls to parents and community agencies. While this kind of general evaluation does not speak to the quality of counselor contacts, it does provide the school board and administration information about the scope or breadth of the counseling program. "Specific evaluation" data takes more counselor planning time. Counselors need to plan to evaluate their work with students (particularly the delivery of the guidance activities in classrooms). Ratings scales to be completed by teachers and/or students and short surveys to determine what students gained from the guidance activities are two additional methods that can be used to evaluate the counseling program. Program evaluation is one of the weakest areas in school counseling. Many counselors will need to seek assistance from nearby counselor educators in setting up their evaluation process.

Continued Professional Development

The need to update professional skills is critical if counselors are to implement the scope of practice described in this paper. Certainly school counselors being trained today have the advantage of graduating from more rigorous counselor education programs than those of the past. However, counselors, particularly those who were trained over a decade ago, must participate in inservice training (designed for counselors not teachers), attend professional meetings, and read professional journals if they intend to meet student needs in this complex society.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract number R188062011. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.